



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 132

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 20)

Before I end this set of Flag Voices with the "way ahead," I would like to share some thoughts provided by CAPT Roger Gibson in response to some questions/concerns expressed in response to this series. CAPT Gibson was XO at ISC Portsmouth where they began using the 12 Questions about two years ago. The following are his remarks:

"The supervisor/subordinate relationship includes every such relationship... all the way from the leading SN...or for that matter the fellow E-2s and E-3s in the berthing area who become the "informal leaders" of the deck gang and the berthing area... up to and including the Commandant. How each of the supervisors performs has impacts on those whom he/she supervises. One big point in the book "First Break all the Rules" is that 'people leave supervisors...not organizations.' This was based on their in depth studies of hundreds of organizations... That said... the Commandant, or someone else way up the chain of command can be a great leader/supervisor... but if the supervisor of a junior officer or petty officer is terrible, there isn't much the Commandant or other senior leader can do to improve the chances of retaining that JO or PO... likewise, if the informal leaders in the berthing area allow the new SAs to be harassed and hazed, our chances of keeping that new SA is also pretty low. Similarly, if a senior member (O-5, O-6, E-8, E-9, what ever) has a lousy supervisor, that may be just the thing that makes them decide it's time to submit the retirement letter... Yes, there are studies that say senior leaders (Baby Boomers) are not in touch with Junior folks (Generation Xers)... and I have no doubt that's true...but the main point of these Flag Voices and the "First Break All the Rules" book is that Supervisors are key to retaining people... If the Supervisor gets in touch with his/her subordinates, up and down the chain of command, then they will understand the needs and demands of those whom they lead, and work to make them reality...

The question about "having the right tools" is another interesting issue. In our careers, we've both heard the critics complain that our "technology" is way behind industry... but I suspect that many businesses go through similar periods...where they have a pot of money to buy new technology...they do that, and when it's finally installed it's already "old"...then they have to make the money (or borrow) to be able to upgrade again..and they aren't saddled with the Federal Procurement Rules/regulations that we are. At my last unit we used this question to get the conversations going with the troops to determine what tools they needed...and of course, were those tools within our ability to provide? The answers were quite surprising. One group of SKs in the Accounting branch said they needed a wide body, high speed printer to enable them to print their LUFs reports out properly and not have to cut and paste later. That was a pretty simple, and inexpensive fix. A group of industrial workers told their supervisor that the

pneumatic tools they had needed to be replaced, they were old, worn, and for some of the fine detail work they had to do, they weren't the right size/tool. So... we ordered new tools for these guys. As Admiral Ames says...the question provides a great place to initiate conversation... especially if these kinds of things aren't happening already. In the two examples I provided, the people responsible for expending the funds were not aware the employees felt they needed these different tools...but the dialog, initiated by the question, got them the information they needed.... AND...interestingly, these actions benefited other questions in the 12 question survey...such as "My opinions seem to count", and so on.

Recognition... Unfortunately when many of us think about recognition, we think medals and awards.... but there are MANY other forms of recognition that this question is actually getting to. These include simple things like "pats on the back" for a job well done (such as "great letter LT," "Excellent job handling the ship Chief," "Superb brief on that SAR case OOD," "Excellent boarding," and so on), page 7s, letters of appreciation, Commander's Intent Award Recognition (used by some units), on the spot cash awards, and many more. In many cases these type of "recognition" mean more to the recipient than a ribbon... But MOST importantly, it shows the employee that their supervisor, or command, recognizes what they are doing and how they are doing it....and that the person's work is important to the missions of the unit and organization.

Have the opportunity to do what I do best every day... This one is tough, because people are assigned to billets or positions, and we have certain things we need to get done there. BUT... in many cases, we find that people are better at certain parts of the job than others. I'll take a PERSRU as an example. Some people are great working records, making entries, getting documents submitted, etc... but they don't work real great with others face to face, and don't handle "unhappy customers" very well. At my last unit we found who those people were pretty quickly... the great record workers were assigned to work records... those who were great dealing with people were assigned to the Customer Service Desk jobs... BOTH individuals (or in our case, many people) were put in positions where they could "do what they do best." The same holds for many other jobs...we have flexibility in what we have people do, and this flexibility exists at the unit level. There are obvious exceptions... like the great boat/ship driving BMC assigned to a desk job at Coast Guard Headquarters...doesn't get a chance to do what he or she does best every day, but with their experience and expertise, they can lend valuable insights to policies and procurements that will impact those who are out on the boats/ships now. Likewise, we often assign Unit Collateral Duties by giving them to people who are good at doing the different jobs. Collateral Duty Public Affairs Officers on units usually are good writers, enjoy talking to the Press, and in many cases coordinating/conducting tours...cause it's in their "make up." These are just a few examples to try to illustrate the point...that we normally have flexibility within our sphere of influence to help in this regard... but if we don't ask people what they do best, we never get the chance to make the adjustment in job assignment, etc."

Next: Where do we go from here? Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: *"First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently."* For more information about the research and book, please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>.



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